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Role of technical/vocational education in informal sector development: a research report of a case study of Siyaso industries in Harare

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Abstract

This study was undertaken to establish the role of education in the development of the informal industrial sector in Zimbabwe. The research used qualitative research methodologies in an attempt to explain the phenomena. A case study using in-depth interviews and observations was carried out with a sample from those working in the 'home industry'. The researcher's own experiences were also used to solicit and interpret data.

Findings showed that while the operators had some education they seemed to be contented with it; the operators tended to use experiences gained in the past to complement their technical and vocational skills in their activities. A closer look showed that there was need for training in various trades and management skills to improve their operations. Those with better education tended to excel in their activities. The research, therefore, suggests that an establishment should be required to look into the technical and vocational educational needs of the informal sector in Zimbabwe. The educational needs should, inter alia, satisfy the needs which should help to develop the informal industrial sector.

Introduction

In this introductory section an overview of the research area is given. Background material of the clientele's expectation of education and the prevailing situation of the economy in Zimbabwe are outlined. The statement of the problem, research objectives, research question and the justification of the research are stated.

1.1 Background

The link between technical/vocational education and socio-economic development has been fairly well established. Education in general has been accepted as an investment while human resource has been accepted as a critical factor in any socio-economic initiative. The problem, however, is how to evolve the type of education that will best suit the human resource needs of any given country. This is, especially true for an education system which equips its recipients with skills which are likely to make them more employable. It is now generally agreed in Zimbabwe that there is a clear mismatch between what education develops in school leavers on the one hand,

and the needs of the world of work on the other¹.

The problem discussed above is particularly serious in Zimbabwe where there are now thousands of secondary school leavers who have passed their ordinary level certificate examination but cannot find employment. The Minister of Education, Mr G Machinga, said that 30,520 pupils finished 'O' Levels but 134,551 pupils failed to get 'A' levels or college training opportunity (The Herald, June, 20 1997). He went on to say that some of the school-leavers join the informal sector to try to solve the unemployment crisis². Policies associated with the structural adjustment programmes only serve to intensify the unemployment crisis. About three hundred thousand job seeking school leavers have joined the band of those made redundant by companies and industries that fold up because of the effects of the programme. Because the great majority of those completing secondary school cannot find employment or enrol for higher education, the informal industrial sector has turned out to be one alternative.

As the informal sector in Zimbabwe grew, the local authorities improved the working environment and conditions by providing fenced open spaces. The spaces were designed to the local population requirements with three major areas developed in Harare viz; Siyaso in Mbare, Gazaland in Highfields and the Glen View in Glen View. There are many other small centres.

The main provisions for the facilities are work bays, some with power, running water and toilets. The occupants pay a nominal fee to the municipality for the use of the facilities. The activities range from the manufacture of door and window components, scotch carts, window and door grills, frames, burglar bars, fireplace grills and so on. Furniture manufacturing includes tables, chairs, wardrobes, cabinets and doors. Sheet metal household utensils manufacturing includes dishes and water buckets. Automotive repairs include trimmings, upholstery, spraypainting and tyre services. Most of what is produced in these operations is sold on site to patrons who come for the commodities and services.

Specialisation in these operations is developing. For example, some of the operatives specialise in oil-drum cutting, some in rolling metal posts and rails while others are responsible for the assembly of the sections, priming and the selling. Other activities include other trades such as the running of restaurants, shop stalls for selling new and reusable second hand parts, plant, equipment servicing and repairing.

The operations of the informal sector are very wide and diverse. The informal sector shows significant promise both politically and economically. When the young are productively involved then problems associated with unemployed youths are minimised and their livelihoods sustained.

The informal sector operators face a number of problems. These include: a lack of knowledge of usable technologies, materials, design, manufacture, business accounting and administration. The lack of relevant vocational/technical education and professional skills are probably the most

critical of the problems faced by the informal sector enterprises operating in Zimbabwe. It is these educational needs of informal sector operators that are of interest to this study.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

In the study, the premise that technical/vocational education contributes to solving the unemployment problem is accepted. How technical/vocational education relates to the informal sector development is what is being researched. Siyaso industries in Harare are the main focus of the study. The question asked is: does educational help improve performance among those already involved in the informal sector of the economy?

1.3 Objectives

The objectives of the study are to :

- identify the technical/vocational educational needs of the informal sector operators.
- investigate the contribution of technical/vocational education to the development of the informal sector.
- recommend ways by which technical/vocational education could be oriented to address the needs of the informal sector entrepreneurs more effectively.

1.4 Significance of the study

This study is significant for a number of reasons. Firstly, findings of the study are likely to benefit the Ministry of Education policy makers and planners and other bodies such as the non-governmental organisations who are looking for ways to enhance the educational skills and overall performance of the informal sector.

Secondly, at a more personal level, findings of this research could be used for educational campaigns to benefit individual informal sector entrepreneurs and bolster their production. This should, it is hoped, result in an enhancement of their own and their immediate families standard of living.

Thirdly, the report supplements the existing limited literature and research on the area of vocational/technical educational needs of the

informal sector. The report could be used in the development of curricular, teaching and learning materials for operatives of the informal sector.

2 Methodology

The methodology used in the study is mainly from the qualitative research paradigm. The paradigm has a great bearing on the type of research design to be chosen. The population, sampling, data collection and analysis were drawn strongly from the research perspective identified.

2.1 Research Design

This is a descriptive study which mainly relies on the generation of qualitative data. In-depth studies of individual informal sector operators formed the main basis of data collection, however, there was flexibility in the use of other data collection techniques perceived relevant to the research project³. The case study was chosen as it is more focused in yielding the type of data anticipated. In the study

“we do not go to the field to test anything but rather go out to collect data about the phenomena for the perspective of the actors in the social setting”³ (p. 13).

2.2 Sample

There are many informal sector establishments in Zimbabwe. In Harare alone there are three main centres. The researcher concentrated on only one, the Siyaso Industries. This industrial site is the biggest, the most popular and populous. This gave the advantage that the research was carried out over a wide variety of operations. Since this group is the biggest, the sample was the best possible. The diversity in activities enabled the study to review across the industrial base. Siyaso is the oldest centre of such industries and thus has had the longest time in operation. This had the advantage that more mature and young operators could be interviewed. The proximity to the suburb and formal industries made the centre very busy and thus business was mostly optimum. This made it possible to solicit very important data for the study.

A sample of six operatives was used in the research. The sample was drawn from the main activities in the centre, that is, those in wood, metal, auto-repairs and petty trading. The sample included both men and women in the trades.

2.3 Data collection

Two data collection techniques were used. One was unstructured interviews which were administered to the selected informal sector entrepreneurs. The interview guide was a series of questions which were used flexibly³. Follow-up questions were asked to probe and obtain in-depth meanings of the issues discussed.

Informal conversations were used as points of entry and to elicit data from some of the entrepreneurs. Less formal settings allowed interviewees to give more detailed information on some of the aspects which were not adequately addressed during individual interviews.

The main issue discussed during data collection was how education, if any, had contributed to the operation and activities of the informal sector. Questions were asked on which aspects of education helped in their activities. For example, which aspects in technical/vocational education had directly contributed to their work and activities. If they were given a chance to review education they were asked which aspects of the curriculum they would like emphasised. What items they would want if further training was possible? Did school leavers in the informal section find skills learnt from school beneficial in their activities?

Participant observation was the second data gathering strategy used. Items and points observed were carefully screened and then listed. An observation checklist was then constructed to guide the observer. The data gathered through the observation mainly revolved around organisation of work, relationships, records, quality of work and processes used in their activities. This was drawn mainly from the researcher's own experiences in technologies. Personal experiences are very important in data

collection within the qualitative paradigm⁴. Observation of the operatives at work also helped in validation and cross checking of the issues discussed in the interviews.

2.4 Procedure

The researcher made many visits to the site to familiarise himself with the operations and people at Siyaso. This was important because people tended to resist any new person who wanted to interview them. Talking to individuals began as soon as rapport was established. Many visits were necessary because of the conversational techniques used. After interviewing, the researcher watched the operations to cross validate the interview. A report was compiled immediately after the interview. It was necessary to revisit some interviewees to clarify certain issues which otherwise would be missing when writing the draft report.

2.5 Data Analysis

Data collected in the in-depth interviews was analysed by its qualitative interpretativeness to the phenomena. Meanings of the discussions were drawn, coded and categorised into themes using the grounded theory⁴. Values and meanings were attached to the observations. Cross validation between what was discussed and observed was undertaken.

3 Results

The results showed that the operatives in Siyaso were characterised by low levels of secondary school pass rate and those with only primary education. Those with fairly good 'O' level pass rates were in the home industry as a result of economic forces. These had desperately sought for jobs in the formal sector and had failed. The ages of the sample ranged from twenty to forty five years of age. The sector had many school drop outs.

The reasons that individuals were working in the home industry were multiple. One reason was the loss of a job in the formal sector due to the country's shrinking economy because of constraints brought about by ESAP. Another was the successes achieved by those already working in the home industry. Family

influence also brought some to the industry, notably members of the Apostolic Faith religious sect.

Q2 *Do you have any academic qualification?*

A I only did primary school and I couldn't go further.

a Why?

I am born in a polygamous family and it was difficult to get money for further education. I did grade 7 but did not pass well either. Our religion is not very encouraging too.

b Do you send your children to school?

Yes, I insist they go to school. Life without education is very difficult, I do not want my children to end up here doing what I am doing.

Q3 *What are you trained, if any, to do?*

A When I left school I started working with elders. I did metalwork and woodwork. We made all sorts of things - but small. I can say I was self trained.

a Do you not think it was apprenticeship?

Yes, one can say so but I was mostly copying what the elders did. I went to these working areas just to spend time.

Family traditions in craft still extended to junior family members. These came to Siyaso when the Municipality designated this area for craft and trade in the informal sector. Of importance is the fact that the operators indicated that they were not willing to go out to seek work in the formal sector anymore. They felt that what they were now doing was important, that it was well-paid and in any case they did not have the qualifications to work elsewhere.

Q12 *Do you one day wish to work for a company? &*

Q13 *Why would you want/not want to work for a company?*

A Now its very difficult to go anywhere.

I am not formally trained in what I am doing here. I do not have five 'O' levels. I do not have trade certificate and the company experience asked for so I cannot even think of doing that. The work I do here and the money I get makes me get by. I can pay my rents, food and clothing for myself and my family.

- a How big is your family?
I have three children.

The operators enjoyed the fluidity, flexibility and diversity of the products and the trade. They preferred the independence they enjoyed to the constrained atmosphere of the formal sector.

Most operatives interviewed were not formally trained in the jobs they were doing. The skills they engaged in were mostly obtained by on-the-job training. They gained skills by being an assistant to someone experienced or by assimilation through an association with the trade over a long period of time. Some had formal training from companies that they had worked for before they were sacked.

The spaces the operatives worked from are municipal owned and the stands are leased. Some of the working system is feudal. The original owner sub-leases to tenants who pay every month. Some operatives share stands and contribute equally to the cost for them at the end of the month. In some cases the original landlord still operated their stands.

When asked what they (the operators) thought about how their education was helping them in their work, they said whatever education or literacy they had was adequate.

Q8 *Do you find the education you have of any use to what you are doing?*

A I did 'O' level but did not get enough passes for me to get into colleges but the education I got is enough for me to read, write and to understand things in general. In a way it helps me to understand the engines I repair. You know its difficult to understand and work with things one cannot figure out. Some of my friends here cannot explain, say timing in cars, I can but not exactly from school but from working with terms used in English for example.

Q9 *What level of education would one require to work with what you are doing?*

A Its difficult to say what level because I have 'O' level and feel adequate, my friends here might not have 'O' levels but can repair cars. Some skills you learn as you observe

but obviously education makes you learn better.

- a Can you suggest a minimum?
'O' level, I think. Reading and writing would be an advantage. Sometimes we argue about cars and some guys with manuals read out the instructions and diagrams. If you can read you can quickly understand.
- b Do you use these books here?
No, we just repair from experience but like I have said we at times argue and a manual solves although some of my friends despise them. Old cars are very difficult to repair from books they have been altered and modified many times and at times they are impossible to repair.
- c Do you get many cases like that?
Yes, but we always go round the problem.
- e Would you say most of your colleagues here have at least 'O' levels? No, most say they have some 'O' levels one subject, two subjects or even more than five but you cannot be sure because no one asks for certificates so people lie just to make the others believe they have some education. When I came here not many people had these high qualifications but the young boys and girls joining us now, I believe, have 'O' levels they cannot find jobs anywhere.
- f Do you think young people have an attitude?
People want to go and get work elsewhere but when it fails, they want to come here - now its full too. But those coming from the country without any skills come here too and say they can do any job they can get. Some get their relatives or friends.

They said their businesses were mostly manufacturing or repair and marketing which did not demand high levels of education. The 'O' level passes they had or primary education they had seemed adequate for their purposes. However, they expressed high consideration for anyone among them with higher education. Those with higher education certificates were regarded as better skilled and that they were quick to learn new tasks and improved problem solving capabilities. The operatives yearned for more education if given the chance. They longed for training in practical subjects that were in line with the

trader and technical skills they required.

Q9 *What level of education would one require to work with what you are doing? &*

Q10 *Which education do you find most suitable for the activities you do?*

A A good hand in practical work is necessary but I think the 'O' levels would be just enough.

Qa *Do you mean 'O' level with practical subjects?*

Yes I think so. Look if one is retrenched without any practical skills what will you survive on? I could find something to do because I am skilled. I am surviving ESAP very well. Practicals are important I assure you.

There was desire to be trained in business management. Asked if trained they would seek for jobs in the formal sector, they said they would rather continue with the home industry. They also added that jobs were becoming more scarce in the formal sector and that very high levels of education, skills and experiences were now being called for.

The operators aspired for better premises although they said higher rents and rates would be required. They said some clients do not pay them well so they find it very difficult to afford bigger and fitted facilities. The promised newer premises might improve the negative attitudes some people have for Siyaso industries. Siyaso was associated with stealing, cheating, poor quality of goods and dubious services. Asked if they had borrowing facilities they said banks do not even look at them as viable ventures. The problem is made worse by people's attitudes, lack of collateral and lack of proper business outlook. Most complained of lack of capital to expand operations. The interviewees viewed the future of Siyaso with indifference and doom. The facility needs a face lift and perhaps the establishment of another site. Some operators hinted that the place was going to be relocated elsewhere because the present site is now earmarked for the development of flats by the Ministry of Construction and National Housing.

Observation tended to confirm what was said by the interviewees. The products made depended on the craftsperson. The quality of the goods ranged from very good to poor. It was observed that some items were custom-made and that the clients tended to vary. The clients with money had better products and the poorer quality goods were for the rural poor clients. The range of prices was not very variable: they charged about the same for most goods and services provided. When observed it was noted that those who were said to have higher educational qualification seemed more organised and produced better quality goods and services than their co-workers. Another trend observed was that those said to be better educated performed better.

The Siyaso facility needed a facelift if not overhauling. Order was not controlled resulting in confusion particularly to a newcomer. Brokers found on the periphery of the industry con people and thereby compromise their sense of security.

3.1 Discussion

The study is on the contribution of education towards the development of the informal sector in Zimbabwe. The study identified and confirmed the idea that technical/vocational education has a lot of potential in the development of the informal sector⁵. Technical/vocational education curriculum offers the only alternative in manpower development. Education provides a sound base for both the formal and informal sector manpower needs of the economy particularly in the developing world¹.

The study has found that those involved in the informal sector at Siyaso had some education ranging from primary education to secondary education. School drop-outs were also found. The operation level of the informal sector provide basic and necessary everyday needs of the local but simple society. This accounted for the simplicity in goods provided and the services offered. This being the scenario the educational demand may be somewhat low. Low educational demands of the sector should not necessary mean total absence of basic education. As noted in the results some level of educational attainment

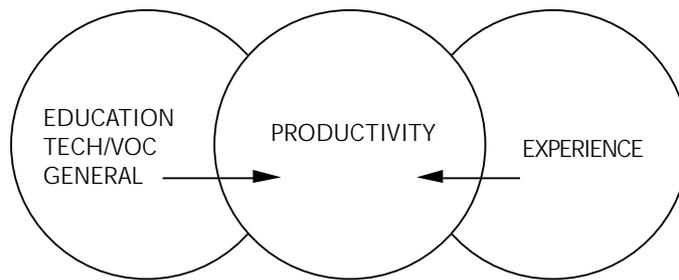


Figure 1 Productivity as a Factor of Education and Experience

is essential. The 'three Rs' would form a reasonable educational base. One can promote this venture as one of the solutions to employment of the many school drop-outs.

Those with primary education did very well in the sector. The output and quality tended to improve with those with technical/vocational education. The operators at Siyaso indicated their education was adequate; even those with only primary school education. The main issue here was that of the experience and education levels as a productivity factor as indicated in Figure 1. Productivity tended to improve with experience and educational level attained given the same plane of operation.

Performance in the home industry varied with education. Those with lower pass rates at 'O' level were not as good as those with better passes. Performance was measured by the

quality of goods and services produced. This might also have something to do with motivation. Those with a higher level of education were highly regarded by the operatives. Many thought a better education gave one better chances of quickly grasping the problems that confront their businesses. Those with technical vocational secondary schools education had even better skills. Figure 2 shows education and experience as they relate to performance.

The group which was made redundant from the formal sector but now operating from Siyaso also ranged from those without high education qualifications to those who only had on-the-job training experience. When the operators perform in the informal sector the main skills issue that emerged was experience. The concentration on the development of skills and the time one spends working tended to contribute towards the perfection of trade

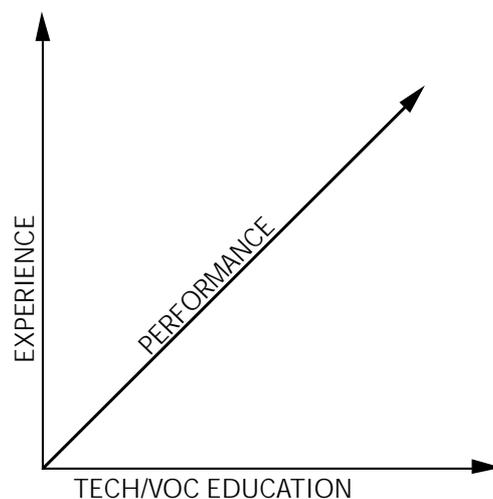


Figure 2 Tech/Voc Education and Experience as a Factor of Performance

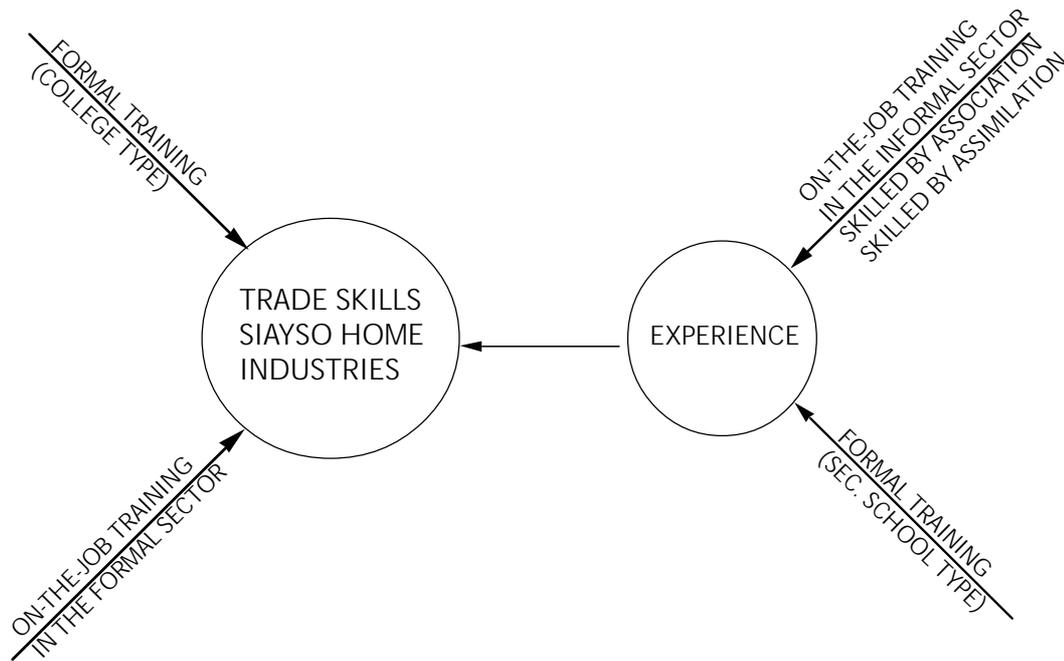


Figure 3 Mode of Trade Skills Acquisition at Siyaso Home Industry

and skills. This factor also tended to eradicate the educational difference that was initially envisaged. The discourse on trade skills attainment is shown in Figure 3.

The figure shows various attributes which contribute to perfection of trade skills. Results indicated that from the formal sector came trade skills learnt in two ways, these are, college trained artisans and non formally trained artisans (apprenticeship type but not certified). Siyaso used trade skills from school leavers, school drop-outs and others who gained skills by experience. The experiences were gained through association and by assimilation.

Almost all operators stated that there was a need to expand and improve the level of both technical and trade skills. They felt that with a good technical/vocational educational base they could expand and improve their operations. Some indicated the need for business training. If the operators were granted these skills, surely the image and outlook of the informal sector would improve. Paradoxically the tendency by authorities is to ignore the needs of the informal sector. This is usual because of attitudes camouflaged by

lack of money to undertake the necessary improvements. When attitudes and outlook change other auxiliary sectors like banks and donor groups would find the means to help. This would then motivate and create confidence in the members.

3.2 Conclusion and Recommendations

There definitely is a need for educational intervention if the informal sector is to develop. The members of the sector seem contented with the level of education they have and with the level of operations they do, this is a typical self-fulfilment complex. An observer can see the relationship between education and performance productivity if he/she stands back and looks. Education involvement in the informal sector would be in three phases. These are:

- 1 Education before joining the sector that is, the primary and secondary level (with technical education in general).
- 2 Technical/Vocational training (college) with emphasis on vocationalisation based on a specific trade area relevant to the anticipated field of operation.
- 3 In-house and concurrent and upgrading skill training as the operators work. This should not change the sector but improve

operations; although change which resulted in development of the sector would be welcome.

The operators, however, indicated that technical/vocational and business training would enhance their operations and facilitate expansion and confidence. The sector would also be recognised by institutions that could help in money and kind. The proposed new Siyaso might bring with it better facilities. With better equipment the operators would improve their out put both in quality and quantity. Siyaso means 'Let be' and the greater chances are that those in authority will take the name seriously and leave the situation as it is.

This study recommends that more studies be undertaken to pinpoint the Technical/Vocational Educational requirements of the informal sector. This would then facilitate a base for drawing up programmes of action. The study recommends that schools should teach and train skills which are directly usable in the informal sector. These skills would help the school leavers who fail to gain employment in the formal sector. The study also recommends training programmes for those already working in the informal sector. A needs analysis research should be carried out to determine the exact educational

requirements. There is also a need to undertake a research to assess the productivity and performance of the operators at Siyaso based on whether they are school leavers, drop-outs or those from the formal industry.

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